

Solomon and Sheba

A RABBIN once told me of an ingenious invention, which in the Talmud is attributed to Solomon; and this story shows that there are some pleasing tales in that immense compilation.

The power of the monarch had spread his wisdom to the remotest parts of the known world. Queen Sheba, attracted by the splendour of his reputation, visited this poetical king at his own court; there, one day to exercise the sagacity of the monarch, Sheba presented herself at the foot of the throne; in each hand she held a wreath; the one was composed of natural, and the other of artificial flowers. Art, in the labour of the mimetic wreath, had exquisitely emulated the lively hues of nature; so that at the distance it was held by the queen for the inspection of the king, it was deemed impossible for him to decide, as her question imported, which wreath was the production of nature, and which the work of art. The sagacious Solomon seemed perplexed; yet to be vanquished, though in a trifle, by a trifling woman, irritated his pride. The son of David, he who had written treatises on the vegetable productions “from the cedar to the hyssop,” to acknowledge himself outwitted by a woman, with shreds of paper and glazed paintings! The honour of the monarch’s reputation for di-

vine sagacity seemed diminished, and the whole Jewish court looked solemn and melancholy. At length, an expedient presented itself to the king; and one, it must be confessed, worthy of the naturalist. Observing a cluster of bees hovering about a window, he commanded that it should be opened: it was opened; the bees rushed into the court, and alighted immediately on one of the wreaths, while not a single one fixed on the other. The baffled Sheba had one more reason to be astonished at the wisdom of Solomon.

This would make a pretty poetical tale. It would yield an elegant description, and a pleasing moral; that *the bee* only *rests* on the natural beauties, and never *fixes* on the painted flowers, however inimitably the colours may be laid on. Applied to the *ladies*, this would give it pungency. In the “Practical Education” of the Edgeworths, the reader will find a very ingenious conversation about this story.